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“God’s Caliph” Revisited: Umayyad Political Thought in its Late Antique Context

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Keywords: caliphate; political theory; Byzantium; Rome; titulature

Abstract: This chapter reviews the evidence for the use of the title “God’s caliph” in the early Islamic period. It makes the case that the Islamic ruler’s titles closely resembled those of their Roman rivals and, like their Roman counterparts, should be understood as addressing diverse audiences, with the “protocollary” title “commander of the faithful” being used most commonly and in all contexts, and with “God’s caliph” being used less frequently and often in courtly or panegyric contexts. Intertextualities between the Qur’ān, the caliphal title and wider late antique discourse around the idea of Man as being made in God’s image are placed in the context of conflict between Rome and the Umayyads.

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In 743 AD, the caliph al-Walīd II (r. 743–744) is said to have circulated a letter to the eastern provinces of the Muslim empire. In the letter, al-Walīd II set out his plans for the succession to the caliphate. He framed this testament with a now well-known statement about the status of the Muslim monarch as “God’s caliph” (*khalīfat Allāh*—that is,

“God’s deputy”, or “God’s viceregent”). The caliphs are presented as the new intermediaries between God and Man, replacing the prophets, whose era had ended with the death of Muḥammad 111 years earlier:

Then God deputed His caliphs (*khulafā’ahu*) over the path of His prophethood—that is, when He took back His Prophet and sealed His revelation with him—for the implementation of His decree (*ḥukm*), the establishment of his normative practice (*sunna*) and restrictive limits (*ḥudūd*) ... strengthening the strands of His covenant (*ḥabl*) ...

God (blessed and exalted is He) says, “And if God had not kept back the people, some by means of others, surely the earth would have been corrupted; but God is bounteous to mankind.” (Q. 2:252)

So, God’s Caliphs followed one another ... No-one can dispute their right without God casting him down, and nobody can separate from their polity (*jamā’a*) without God destroying him, nor can anyone hold their government in contempt or query the decree of God (*qadā’ Allāh*) concerning them without God placing him in their power and giving them mastery over him, thus making an example and a warning to others. This is how God has acted towards anyone who has departed from the obedience to which He has ordered [people] to cling, adhere and devote themselves, and through which it is that the heaven and earth came to be supported. God (blessed and exalted is He) has said, “When your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am placing a deputy (*khalīfa*) on earth,’ they said, ‘Are You placing

in it someone who will act corruptly and shed blood while we are celebrating

Your praise and sanctifying You?’ He said, ‘I know what you know not’ (Q 2:28).”

Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds translated the letter and discussed it in some detail in their 1986 book *God’s Caliph*.² They accepted the unanimous opinion of previous scholars that it was an authentic copy of a real document issued by the caliphal *dīwān al-rasā’il* (“office of public letters”, or “chancery”). Although there are some reasons for caution, circumstantial evidence—discussed further below—does tend to suggest that the letter may indeed be at least an approximation of an original.³

That said, whether or not this specific letter is authentic is less significant when the wider corpus of public letters that purport to be from the later Umayyad period are read together. Then, certain features recur that are unique to this corpus and do indeed appear to reflect distinctively Umayyad-era political culture.⁴ Among these features are the use of the title *khalīfat Allāh*, “God’s caliph”, in the complete absence of what might (from a later ‘classical’ perspective) be the expected formula—*khalīfat rasūl Allāh* (‘successor to God’s Messenger’). In Iḥsān ‘Abbās’ edition letters by two of the last heads of the Umayyad *dīwān al-rasā’il*, which includes this letter, the title *khalīfat Allāh* occurs on about eight further occasions, whereas the later title *khalīfat rasūl Allāh* does not occur at all.⁵ The same pattern is found in the poetry, particularly from the Marwanid Umayyad period (684–750), but also some which purports to date from the very first decades of the caliphate.⁶ Furthermore, some of the Umayyads’ enemies also acknowledged that this was the title they used of themselves.⁷

In most classical Islamic political thought, it is held that this Umayyad title, *khalīfat Allāh*, was an aggrandizing innovation, and that the original title, *khalīfat rasūl Allāh*, in use under the very first caliphs, had been distorted. The “correct” title was then restored to use during the Abbasid era (750–1258), although rulers continued to use *khalīfat Allāh* as well in certain contexts.⁸

In 1986, Crone and Hinds sought to rethink this classical position. They argued that it was simpler and more elegant to suggest that the title *khalīfat Allāh* in fact predated *khalīfat rasūl Allāh*.⁹ Furthermore (and departing from the earlier work of Montgomery Watt on this point), they argued that the origins of *khalīfat Allāh* as a title for the Muslims’ leader lay at the very beginning of Islam, with the succession to Muḥammad in 632.¹⁰ It reflected a “common conception of the caliphal office” in the first centuries of Islam, which was of “the Shī‘ite type”, uniting authority over both political matters and religious law; only later, with the development of classical Sunni Islam during and after the ninth century, did the division between caliph and scholars emerge, where the latter held authority over the religious law.¹¹ They also thought it most unlikely that the title “God’s caliph” derived from any Roman or Iranian influence, but rather that it was an autochthonous Arabian (or just possibly Samaritan) formulation, which reflected the distinctive fusion of religious and political leadership in Islam.¹²

Of their four conclusions, none has been uncontroversial, but the first and second have best stood the tests of the last thirty years: the idea that *khalīfat Allāh* in fact predated the longer formula that included the Prophet is now quite widely (but by no means universally) accepted.¹³ It is also quite widely accepted that the more plenipotentiary

understanding of caliphal authority over the law predated, or at least coexisted with, other sources of authority within the wider Muslim community.¹⁴

The idea of the title's unique Arabian origin has fared less well. Indeed, in her 2004 *Medieval Muslim Political Thought*, Crone herself reassessed the evidence for the origins of the title, concluding that the title *khalīfat Allāh* in the sense of "God's caliph", or "God's deputy", rather than being distinctive to Islam, "seems to be rooted in Hellenistic conceptions", as they had been taken up in the Christian Eastern Roman Empire:

The [Hellenistic] king had been fashioned on the model of his Maker; he was the image of God, the archetype of the true king, as the pagans said and the Christians started agreeing when Constantine converted.¹⁵

When the Hellenistic conception of monarchy was adopted by Muslims is not clear, but "these ideas had ... contributed to the Muslim concept of the imamate, perhaps from the start, certainly from the Umayyad period onwards."¹⁶ The early Islamic title *khalīfat Allāh* is now presented as related directly to late Roman conceptions of monarchy and as originating in the middle decades of the seventh century.¹⁷

However, the evidence for these very earliest usages of "God's Caliph" derives from the much later literary tradition. As a consequence, a number of scholars have recently arrived at different conclusions. In 2000, Ella Landau-Tasseron downplayed any as it were proto- or quasi-Shī'ite notions of the caliphate belonging to a bloodline or having a sacral status at the outset.¹⁸ Instead she maintained that the earliest sense of the title

“caliph” (*khalīfa*) was simply, *pace* Crone and Hinds, “successor”—i.e. to the Prophet in the leadership of the Muslims—in a context where leadership was elective.¹⁹ *Khalīfat Allāh*, she suggested, might have been an Umayyad-era innovation, intended to transcend divisions in the nascent Muslim Empire by asserting the divine right of the Umayyads, elevating them above the elected leaders of earlier times.²⁰

In 2005, Avraham Hakim took a very different approach to the problem through a study of the attribution, in the ninth- and tenth-century Hadith literature, of the titles *khalīfat Allāh* and *khalīfat rasūl Allāh* to the second caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 634-644). Hakim was able to show that both titles were in circulation by the early eighth century at the very latest. Although this says nothing about what the Umayyad caliphs called themselves, it does tend to suggest a more complex picture than that proposed by Crone and Hinds, with “deputy” and “successor” existing in parallel in some circles from quite early on.²¹

Others have looked to the documentary evidence. In 2006, Robert Hoyland picked up on what he described as Landau-Tasseron’s “evolutionary” perspective on the caliphate and noted the coincidence of the first documentary attestation of the title on coins dating from 694-5 (75 AH): “Was he [‘Abd al-Malik] the first to use the title *khalīfat Allāh* as the numismatic record implies?”²² In 2010, Fred Donner developed this line of reasoning, in an argument about the doctrinal position of the seventh-century Muslims, whom he prefers to term “Believers”, on the basis that *mu’minūn* (“faithful” or “believers”) appears to have been the main label used by the early generations of Muḥammad’s community. He suggests that the caliphate of ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705) was a turning-point in the development of a distinctively “Islamic” identity (as opposed to a more generally

monotheist one) and that the “adoption, for a brief period, of the title *khalifat allah* ... on a few transitional coins” was, part of ‘Abd al-Malik’s “determined program of emphasizing the status of the Qur’an and its legitimating value, among the Believers”. Donner also notes that the title echoes the Qur’an’s description of King David as *khalīfat Allāh fi ’l-ard* (“God’s deputy on earth”, Q. 38:26), and that its use in 694-695 followed ‘Abd al-Malik’s completion, in 691–692, of the Dome of the Rock in David’s city, Jerusalem.²³ In his 2011 *Empires of Faith*, Peter Sarris accepts both Donner’s model of the early polity and his conclusions about the title *khalīfat Allāh*, but combines these with the observations that the title may have been used “in direct rivalry to the ideological claims made by emperors in Constantinople.”²⁴

Hence, whereas for Crone and Hinds (1986) the title *khalīfat Allāh* went back to the 630s, and for Crone (2004) it was at least a consistent element of Umayyad ideology, other commentators have focused on the point that the only *documentary* (as opposed to literary) attestations of *khalīfat Allāh* before the early ninth century occur on a very rare series of coins struck between *ca.* 694 and *ca.* 697. For Hoyland, Donner and Sarris, this contributes to the sense that the title was an exception and probably an innovation, and is the basis of their suggestion that the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 684–705, uncontested 692–705) was the moment that this title was first used. For Landau-Tasseron, of course, *khalīfat Allāh* was not only innovation but also a departure from the use of *khalīfa* in the sense of “successor”—in line with the classical tradition and as opposed to Crone and Hinds’ critique of that same tradition. Meanwhile, Hakim has identified a discourse going back to the early eighth century where the two titles existed in parallel, in some circles at least.

What all scholars apart from Crone and Hinds share is scepticism concerning the centrality of the title in the “common conception of the caliphate” and all (except Hakim) have a sense that the title *khalīfat Allāh* is rather somehow exceptional—even for some unique to the mid-690s—and, respectively, related directly either to the war with ‘Abd al-Malik’s rival for the caliphate, Ibn al-Zubayr (r. 683–692), or to competition with the Roman Emperor Justinian II (r. 685–695, 705–711).²⁵

Certainly, *khalīfat Allāh* was not the caliph’s most common title. As Crone and Hinds themselves observed:

It was not of course the title commonly used for purposes of address and reference to individual Umayyad caliphs. For such purposes *amīr al-mu’minīn*, “commander of the faithful”, was adopted, and this title is far more densely attested in the sources than *khalīfa*.

Indeed, the more quotidian *amīr al-mu’minīn* appears very often as a pairing, *‘abd Allāh ... amīr al-mu’minīn*, “God’s servant (or slave) ... commander of the faithful.”²⁶

Typically, this would bracket the name of the caliph, as in the earliest extant examples on coins, inscriptions and papyrus protocols (the earliest of which date from 661–662), *‘abd Allāh Mu‘āwiya amīr al-mu’minīn* (“God’s Servant Mu‘āwiya, Commander of the Faithful”).²⁷ In the edited letters of Salīm and ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, which mostly date from the 730s and 740s, *khalīfat Allāh* appears about ten times and *amīr al-mu’minīn* on more than forty occasions.²⁸ The latter then remained the standard caliphal title throughout the history of Islam.²⁹ However, absence of evidence for the Umayyad period is not evidence

of absence and, as we have seen, both the poetry and prose—as preserved in the later classical tradition—record “God’s Caliph” quite frequently, albeit far less often than “Commander of the Faithful.”

In what follows, an attempt is made to make sense of this evidence, and to move forward from the diverse positions of the recent commentators. It is proposed that a new theoretical perspective on titulature is the best starting point for understanding the development of the title “God’s Caliph.” Leaders’ titles are a form of political communication—they are articulations directed at specific audiences and to specific ends. From this follow two further points. First, the use of caliphal titles needs to be carefully contextualised: the title could have very different purposes and different receptions depending upon whether it was deployed, for example, in contests with the Roman Empire or with other members of the new Arabian monotheist elite. Second—and crucially—there are different types of title and epithet, and so it is a mistake to treat *khalīfat Allāh* in isolation from other caliphal titles, or as somehow equivalent in purpose to those other titles; different titles were appropriate for different contexts and purposes.³⁰ This latter point is acknowledged by Crone and Hinds when they observe that *khalīfat Allāh* was not “commonly used for purposes of address and reference to individual Umayyad caliphs.” It is further suggested here that there is a near exact parallel between the caliphs “protocollary” title (i.e. *amīr al-muʿminīn*) and his more aggrandizing titles, appropriate usually for court contexts or polemical purposes (e.g. *khalīfat Allāh*), on the one hand, and the Roman imperial equivalents (e.g. *autokrator*, or “emperor”, as opposed to *eikon theou*, or “image of God”), on the other. This is not necessarily to suggest any simple process of “borrowing” or “influence.” Rather, it probably indicates a shared

cultural milieu, which can indeed, after Crone (2004), be traced to Hellenistic kingship in its post-Constantinian, Near Eastern iteration. In early Islam, as elsewhere, royal titles (and caliphs are, in structural or “outsider” terms, in some sense kings), are interventions in discourse—arguments in a contest—and not statements of “fact.”³¹

By beginning with the evidence for this discourse in the Christian Roman Empire we can establish the basis for a comparison with the situation in early Islam. Then we can turn to the Islamic evidence, returning in particular to al-Walīd II, since the evidence for his use of the title “God’s Caliph” is unusually rich. This allows us to see the extent to which the emperors and the caliphs were participating in a shared, or at least overlapping, discourse or discourses. From there, we can broaden our perspective on the Islamic evidence to take in the coins struck by ‘Abd al-Malik in order to identify some other ways in which “God’s Caliph” may have been used in the conflict between the two empires, as well as within the new Muslim empire itself.

Finally, in the conclusion, we can turn to consider the possible origins of the caliphal titles, and the milieu in which they took shape and became normative. A single specific origin for the title “God’s caliph” cannot be identified if (as seems unlikely) it ever existed; what is clear is that a “common conception of the caliphate” was something that emerged with conquests and the expansion of the Muslim empire, was never stable, and was always contested. As a result, the meaning of the title itself was open to interpretation. In Islam as in Rome there was a tension between earthly authority and transcendent power—who, ultimately, had the right to “bind and loose”, was the crux of the matter. In Christian Rome, the monarch was in some senses both “priest” and “king”; as such, he could not simply inherit power but also needed to be acclaimed by God’s

chosen people.³² The status of the caliph in Islam was similar—even where a bloodline was acknowledged, pledged allegiance—the re-enactment of the covenant—made the caliph a sort of “sacral king.”³³

<1> *Roman imperial titulature in Late Antiquity*

As Crone suggests, a crucial context for thinking about caliphal titles is Roman Christian political thought. Indeed, there is a near exact analogy here with the Roman Emperor’s claim, in the Hellenistic tradition of sacral monarchy, to be the deputy or the image—in Greek, the *hyparchos* or *eikōn*, in Latin, the *vicarius* or *imago*—of God. In Trinitarian thought (at least as it was understood in court circles), the emperor was God’s image in the dual sense that he was both the image of Christ and also in that Adam (and so all mankind) was understood to be made in God’s image. (As Crone notes, in the strictly monotheist early Islamic context the ruler could not easily literally be God’s image, but he could be God’s deputy).³⁴

Just as the title *khalīfa* was almost never used in formal, protocollary, contexts by the Umayyads, these claims to “resemblance” to, or “deputyship” of, God were rarely used in formal protocol among the Romans. Rather, the emperor had a number of formal titles, including “Augustus” and, of course, “Emperor” (Greek, *autokrator*, Latin *imperator*). Hence, the sixth-century Oxyrhynchus papyri include contracts dated by formulas such as, “the reign of our godlike and pious master Flavius Justinian the eternal Augustus (and) Emperor” (*basileias tou theiotatou kai eusebestatou hēmōn despotou flaouiou Ioustinianou tou aiōniou Augoustou [kai] autokratoros*).³⁵ By the early seventh century ‘king’ (*basileus*), which had long been used informally and in diplomatic language, had also become a formal imperial title; Heraclius (r. 610–641) and his son

referred to themselves in an edict of 21 March 629 as “Heraclius and Heraclius the New Constantine, Kings Faithful in Christ” (*Herakleios kai Herakleios neos Kōnstantinos pistoi en Christō basileis*).³⁶

For claims that the emperor was “God’s deputy” or “God’s image” we must turn to panegyric, to the more aggrandizing imperial decrees, and to the iconography of imperial ceremonial. The starting point is the *Tricennial Oration* of Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (d. 339), performed in 335–336, at the thirtieth jubilee of the Emperor Constantine (r. 306–337). In this speech, Eusebius used the ancient Hellenistic idea of the sacral king to present the newly Christian emperor as God’s deputy on earth. In the passage where *hyparchos* appears, Eusebius is describing Constantine’s conversion of pagan temples into churches:

For while the Common Saviour of the Universe punished invisible beings invisibly, he [Constantine], as the deputy of the Supreme Sovereign (*hoia megalou basileōs hyparchos*) proceeded against those so vanquished, stripping their long and utterly dead corpses and distributing the spoils freely among the soldiers of the victor.³⁷

In the three centuries after Constantine and before the caliphate monotheist sacral monarchy was elaborated, becoming part of the ideology of Christian Empire. In court circles and in panegyrics the emperor was not only God’s delegate on earth, ruling with God’s authority, but also God’s likeness or image. Hence, Emperor Justinian (r. 527–565) declares in the preface to his *Digest* that “Governing our empire by the authority of God,

which has been entrusted to us (*deo auctore nostrum gubernantes imperium quod nobis a caelesti maiestate traditum est*), we win victory in war, cultivate the arts of peace, and preserve the State.”³⁸ Of Justinian’s successor, Justin II (r. 565–574), the panegyricist Corippus says, “Christ granted the lords of the earth to have power over all things. He is omnipotent; and he [the emperor] is the likeness (or image) of the omnipotent.”³⁹

That the same ideas circulated far beyond Constantinopolitan court circles is suggested by the anonymous Armenian history attributed to Sebeos. This text, which probably dates to the latter part of the seventh century, refers to an Armenian nobleman who refused to rebel against Emperor Heraclius, justifying his loyalty on the basis of the emperor’s status as God’s deputy: “but he did not agree to the murder of the king [Heraclius] and his sons. Rather he said, ‘You call them vicars (i.e. ‘deputies’, *telepah*) of God; so it is not right to participate in that act.’”⁴⁰

The Bible was the source of archetypes that could be deployed to emphasise the sacred status of the emperor as the “re-born” and “de-judaised” Israelite monarch of God’s chosen people.⁴¹ Hence, a homily on the 626 siege of Constantinople:

Our emperor [Heraclius] is a new David in his piety and his clemency to his subjects. And the Lord will crown him with victories like David, and his son who reigns with him, making him wise and peaceable like Solomon, and bestowing on him and his father piety and orthodoxy.⁴²

Similarly, Corippus alluded the parallel between Adam’s dominion and the emperor in his panegyric for Justin II.⁴³ These Biblical archetypes were also invoked visually in the

spaces where imperial power was enacted publicly. For example, at Justinian's foundation of St Catherine's in Sinai, the mosaic image of the transfigured Christ is surrounded by roundels depicting the patriarchs, with the crowned figure of David—perhaps also to be identified with Justinian himself—directly below Christ's feet.⁴⁴ The more aggrandizing imperial claims did not go uncontested. Agapetus (*fl. ca. 527*)⁴⁵ acknowledges that the emperor is the image of God but advises that the emperor is also, after all, a mortal human—in an echo of Paul's letters, God's servant or slave—like everybody else:

In his bodily essence, the emperor is the equal of every man, but in the power of his rank he is like God over all men ... For if he is honoured for his divine image, he is nevertheless bound to his earthly image through which he is taught equality with other men ... Treat your servants as you pray that your Master will treat you... The emperor is the master of everyone, but together with everyone he is the slave of God. He will then most properly be called master, when he masters himself.⁴⁶

Others were more vociferous. The career of Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) began at the court of Heraclius and ended with mutilation and exile under Heraclius' son, Constans II (r. 641–668). Maximus had been critical of the monothelete theology promulgated by both emperors and of the aggrandizing claims of the emperors to have authority over religious dogma, usurping (in his view) a role proper to priests. The eyewitness (though highly tendentious) account of Maximus' interrogation in 655 describes his response to

the question, “Is not the Christian emperor also a priest? [i.e. And so may he not involve himself in dogma?]”

No, because he does not have access to the altar; and after the sanctification of the bread he does not raise it, saying: *the holy things to the holy*; he does not baptise, nor does he perform initiation with the *myron* [i.e. the chrism or oil of anointing]; he does not ordain, nor does he make bishops, priests and deacons; he does not consecrate churches by unction; he does not bear the symbols of priesthood, the *omophorion* [vestment] and the Gospel, as he bears those of kingship, the crown and the purple ... But what purpose is served by continuing? During the holy anaphora at the holy table, it is after the hierarchs and the deacons and the whole order of clergy that one remembers the emperors at the same time as the laity, the deacon saying: *and of the laymen who have died in the faith, Constantine, Constans etc.* He also mentions living emperors after the clergy.⁴⁷

For Maximus a clear distinction ought to be maintained between royal and sacerdotal power—a distinction that had been eroded by the claims of the emperors to decide matters of dogma, as kings in Christ and images of Him.

<1> *The ruler as God’s deputy in Islamic late antiquity: the claims of al-Walīd II*

In sixth- and seventh-century Rome, the emperor could claim to be both king and priest—to be the image of Christ and God’s deputy—but these claims were confined to panegyric and court contexts, and provoked both politic reactions, like those of Agapetus, and impolitic ones, like that of Maximus. Protocollary titles remained more reserved:

“commander”—*imperator* or *autokrator*—and, at the height of imperial claims to religious authority, “king”—*basileus*; the emperor could also be reminded that he was, in the end, *doulos theou*—God’s servant. The parallels with the situation of the Umayyad rulers are clear: in protocollary contexts, an Umayyad ruler was “God’s servant ... commander of the faithful”. In certain ceremonial and court environments, however, the caliph was associated much more closely with God. But the Muslim monarch could not claim to be the image of God. Instead he was “God’s deputy” (as the Roman Emperor sometimes was, too). By the later Umayyad period, at the latest, the title God’s caliph could be understood as alluding to what might be seen as the Qur’anic idea of all Mankind’s stewardship of the world (e.g. Q. 6:165, 57:7), and more specifically to the patriarchs Adam and David, as God’s delegates on Earth (Q. 2:28 and 38:26).⁴⁸

Garth Fowden has argued convincingly that we see this idea rendered iconographically under the patronage of the future al-Walīd II.⁴⁹ In around 735, while he was still just heir-apparent to the caliphate, (and about a decade before he sent the letter to the provinces about the succession, cited above), al-Walīd built the small palace complex in the desert east of Amman, in modern Jordan, now famous as Quṣayr ‘Amra.⁵⁰ A small stone-built audience chamber, on a plan familiar from pre-Islamic Romano-Arabian sites, adjoins a bath complex. Nearby are a small mosque, irrigation works and other buildings. The interior of the audience chamber and baths are remarkable—and well known—for the well-preserved frescoes that cover all their interior. Crucially, for the purposes of this discussion, there is an image of a ruler placed directly above the space for the enthroned heir, which draws heavily on Roman, and, specifically, Romano-Syrian, forms.⁵¹

To an observer familiar with Roman imperial iconography (and, indeed, Sasanian iconography), the visual referents would be numerous, and resonant with all the symbolism of monotheist imperial monarchy: this was God's deputy enthroned, as visible in imperial contexts from Constantinople to Taq-i Bustan. However, Fowden suggests that a more specific, and local, reading was also possible. He proposes that the image of the ruler at Qusayr 'Amra was a deliberate allusion to images prevalent in late antique churches in Greater Syria of Adam as God's delegate, holding dominion over the earth,. These include the mosaic of Adam enthroned, now in the Hama Museum, in modern Syria. Elements of this image, including the rounded cushions on each side of the throne, the pillars with capitols supporting an arch, the draped clothing of the seated figure, and the feet placed on a footstool, all bear a particularly close resemblance to the fresco at Qusayr 'Amra.⁵²

[Insert Marsham-Fig-1 here]

[Insert Marsham-Fig.-2 here]

Fowden also observes that other Syrian images likewise depict the animals over which Adam had been given dominion. In the mosaic floor at Hawirtah, the position of the birds flanking Adam's shoulders resembles that of those flanking the ruler at Qusayr 'Amra. In the latter fresco, the ruler is seated above water, where fishes swim, in another more distant echo of the aquatic life depicted some distance from Adam at Hawirtah.

[Insert Marsham-Fig-3 here]

[Insert Marsham-Fig-4 here]

For Fowden, the visual evidence for an allusion to local ideas about Adam's dominion over the earth (and so also its Qur'anic retelling) was compelling, but what clinched the

case was its patron's later letter, where the relevant Qur'anic verse was invoked to provide an archetype of his own caliphal dominion:

When your Lord said to the angels, "I am placing a deputy (*khalīfa*) on earth", they said, "Are You placing in it someone who will act corruptly and shed blood while we are celebrating Your praise and sanctifying You?" He said, "I know what you know not." (Q. 2:28)

(The full verse continues: "He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said: 'Tell me the names of these if ye are right'"). This Qur'anic text, cited by Quṣayr 'Amra's patron, does seem to tie the iconography of that palace to the idea of Adam's dominion over Creation, and so also to the late antique Christian version of the story as depicted in a number of Syrian churches. This is not to suggest that the palace fresco had a single meaning, but it does build a strong case that many Syrians would have read it as an allusion both to imperial power and to Adam, and that these ideas were in the minds of its patron and painter.⁵³

Fowden's case ends here, and is quite convincing on its own terms. However, it is also possible to provide a wider late antique context for al-Walīd's iconography, and for its Qur'anic referent, when it is noted that a number of late antique Jewish and Christian texts from the regions bordering the Arabian Peninsula are especially close to the Qur'anic text. The relevant Biblical story about Adam is found in Genesis:

Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him (Genesis 1:19-20).

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:26–27, my emphasis).

In the late antique Middle East, this story had been elaborated to emphasise the idea of Adam as the archetypal first ruler of the world—and the first in a series of successors to God’s covenant; most likely these elaborations derived ultimately from Hellenistic Jewish sources, such as Philo of Alexandria (d. *ca.* 50 AD).⁵⁴

Hence, the Syriac *Book of the Cave of Treasures*—probably composed in the sixth century—describes itself as a “Book of the Succession of Generations”, setting out the transmission of God’s covenant through the patriarchs from Adam down to the time of Christ. A passage on the naming of the animals expands on Genesis 1.19-20:

Adam was created in Jerusalem. There he was arrayed in the apparel of sovereignty ... And all the wild beasts, and all the cattle, and the feathered fowl were gathered together, and they passed before Adam and he assigned names to them; and they bowed their heads before him; and everything in nature worshipped him, and submitted themselves to him. And the angels and the hosts of heaven heard the Voice of God saying unto him, “Adam, behold; I have made thee king, and priest, and prophet, and lord, and head, and governor of everything which hath been made and created...” And when the angels heard this speech they all bowed the knee and worshipped Him.⁵⁵

Likewise, the Hebrew *Midrash Rabbah*—perhaps compiled around 500 AD—comments on Genesis by developing the theme of God’s being questioned about humanity’s destructive nature, as also in the Qur’an:

Then God said, “Let us make Man in our likeness, and let there be a creature not only the product of the earth, but also gifted with heavenly, spiritual elements, which will bestow on him reason, intellect, and understanding.” Truth then appeared, falling before God’s Throne, and in all humility exclaimed: “Deign, O God, to refrain from calling into being a creature who is beset with the vice of lying, who will tread the earth under his feet.” Peace came forth to support this petition, “Wherefore, O Lord, shall this creature appear on earth, a creature so full of strife and contention, to disturb the peace and harmony of Thy Creation? He

will carry the flame of quarrel and ill-will in his trail; he will bring about war and destruction in his eagerness for gain and conquest.”⁵⁶

The same late antique milieu that produced these commentaries on Genesis, and on the idea of Adam’s dominion over the world, also produced debate on the question about Adam’s “likeness” to God. Here, a prominent strand of the Syriac tradition comes closest to the Qur’anic stance; Ephrem (d. *ca.* 373 AD) argues in his commentary on Genesis that Adam’s “likeness” to God pertains only to his *dominion* and *rule* over Creation, and is not to be interpreted literally (i.e. not that Adam actually *looked like* God):

“And God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image’”. According to what has been the rule until now, if it pleases God, He will make it known to us, Moses explains in which sense we are the image of God, saying: “That he may rule over the birds and beasts and fish of the sea and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” Therefore, Adam, accepted power over the land, and over everything in it; he was in that the likeness of God, in whose power were the heavens and the earth.⁵⁷

On the basis of these texts, it seems almost certain that the Qur’anic use of *khalīfa* to refer not just to Adam and David, but also to other, unnamed “successive generations” (*khulafā’*) of human beings, is to be understood as relating to this wider discourse, in which Adam’s “dominion” and his role as the first in a series of holders of “God’s covenant”, and, in some (highly contested) sense also “God’s likeness” are discussed.⁵⁸

For the later exegetes of the Qur'an—who tended to want to draw a clear line between prophetic and caliphal authority—there was no connection between the caliphate of Adam and David, and the caliphate of the Muslim rulers of their own day;⁵⁹ nor—perhaps less surprisingly given their aversion to Christian apocrypha—did they expound on the question of God's likeness to Man in connection with this passage.⁶⁰ However, al-Walīd II made much of them, and sought to participate in a long-established and live late antique discourse about monotheist monarchy its patriarchal archetypes; these particular implications of the images—and also of texts—he sponsored would have resonated with his post-Roman Syrian audience.⁶¹ As noted above, this association between royal power and Adam's dominion was also familiar in Constantinople.⁶²

<1> *Caliphal titulature as discourse*

That is to say, the meaning of this claim to be God's deputy would, of course, vary with its context. In al-Walīd II's iconography and in his letter—as in other purportedly Umayyad-era texts—the caliphs are placed at the end of the succession of prophets, as guardians of God's covenant with Mankind. In this, the Umayyad material echoes both the Syriac *Book of the Cave of Treasures*, and some of the claims of the Roman emperors. However, in the Umayyad version, the covenant is passed on from Adam to Christ, then to Muḥammad, and thence to the Umayyad monarchs themselves. Thus, the Umayyad caliphs' claims to be *khulafā' Allāh* were at once an analogue of the Roman emperors' claims to be God's *hyparchoi* (and, potentially, a critique of the emperor's claim to be God's *eikōnes*) and also an assertion of their own place as successors to God's covenant in both generally monotheist and more specifically Qur'anic terms.

The audiences for these articulations were diverse, and reception of the title would vary accordingly: allies among the wider Umayyad clan would no doubt receive it approvingly, as might the loyal members of the (post-Roman and Christianised) Arabic-speaking tribes of Syria; other groups—notably the Arabian settlers in Iraq and the population of the Ḥijāz—might have been less receptive.⁶³ All the audiences, however, would have perceived the Umayyads' claims as a challenge to contrasting articulations of legitimacy, whether Roman or Arabian. In the case of the two best-attested assertions of “God's caliphate,” these contexts and audiences can be partially reconstructed. The second of these is the material attributed to al-Walīd II, to which we will return with this question of audience in mind shortly. Before that, however, we should consider the first well-attested assertion of “God's caliphate,” by al-Walīd II's grandfather, ‘Abd al-Malik.

‘Abd al-Malik's reform of the coinage system of his empire, which departed from both the metrical and iconographic forms of the Roman gold (and Iranian silver) system that the Arabians had adopted after the conquests, would certainly have amounted to a very direct challenge to Roman imperial authority. Dinars (gold coins), most likely struck in Syria in the 690s, mark a clear departure in weight and style from previous copies of Roman solidi, replacing the image of the emperor with an image of the caliph, and, on the obverse, a “pole-on-steps”, which amounted to a denial of Roman Trinitarian monotheism.⁶⁴

[Insert Marsham-Fig.-5 here]

While these so-called “standing caliph” dinars have no date marked on them, dirhams (silver coins), derived from a Sasanian prototype, are marked with a year in the lunar Hijri calendar. An example marked 75 AH (694–695 AD), is the first of a very few

dirhams that appear to have been closely modelled on the “standing caliph” dinars, but with the addition of the labels *amīr al-muʿminīn* and *khalifat Allāh* flanking the standing figure (sic: the latter title appears without the long ‘ī’ familiar from classical Arabic, and with a *tāʾ* instead of a *tāʾ marbūta*, as it also does in the Syrian copper coinage from this period).⁶⁵

[Insert Marsham-Fig.-6 here]

The same caliphal titles also appear on some of the so-called “*miḥrāb* and ‘*anaza*” dirhams from the same period, together with the phrase *naṣr Allāh* or *naṣara Allāh* (“God’s victory” or “May God assist”, perhaps likely the former).⁶⁶

[Insert Marsham-Fig.-7 here]

Two years later, in 77/697, a further reform saw the production of entirely aniconic coins, which placed the assertions of God’s unity and the denial of the Trinity at the centre of the two fields. This was a design which broke with the long tradition of royal images on coins in the Middle East. It stuck—lasting in various iterations for over a millennium. All reference to the ruler had disappeared (though it was reinstated by various dynasties after the Umayyad period).⁶⁷

[Insert Marsham-Fig.-8 here]

These iconographic developments have tended to be characterised as the product of a single, specific cause. Often, this is a direct diplomatic exchange between the two empires, with ‘Abd al-Malik’s coins and those of Justinian II (r. 685–695 and 705–711) in dialogue—an interpretation with some basis in the literary sources.⁶⁸ In this assessment, Justinian II’s new coinage, which juxtaposed the bust of Christ and an image of the monarch, and which in some cases were labelled “Christ’s servant” (or “slave”, *servus*

Christi), might be interpreted as a response to the Arabians' new coinage, or vice versa.⁶⁹

However, some recent examinations of the development of the seventh and early eighth century Roman coins have emphasised internal developments as opposed to relations with the Arabians.⁷⁰

That gold was used in payments to the Romans, and was the main precious metal currency in former Roman territories, might suggest that the anti-Trinitarian messages were directed primarily at Constantinople itself, as well as the armies in Syria, while the specific inscriptional assertion about "God's caliph", which occurs only on the dirhams, may have been directed primarily against internal rivals. After all, it is a little difficult to see the "standing caliph" dirhams as part of this direct dialogue between monarchs—one would rather expect the dinars which are said to have been the medium of diplomatic exchange. The obvious alternative, "internal" context for 'Abd al-Malik's coins is the civil war with Ibn al-Zubayr (r. 683–692): 'Abd al-Malik's reform came in the immediate wake of a war over the leadership of the Arabian empire, in which his opponent had made much of his status as a Companion of Muḥammad and his close association with the pilgrimage site of Mecca, and had struck copies of Sasanian coins marked *bismillāh* ("In the name of God").⁷¹ Although there is some metrological evidence that, unusually, 'Abd al-Malik's silver coins were actually struck in Syria, the coins may have been intended for export to Iraq or Iran.⁷²

What is more certain is that reading these coins as the product of a one-dimensional political context is wrong-headed.⁷³ In the 690s, 'Abd al-Malik oversaw the promulgation to the Arabian conquerors on a new scale of claims to monotheist, imperial authority.⁷⁴ Competition with Constantinople in Syria, Asia Minor, the Transcaucasus, North Africa

and the Mediterranean was one powerful consideration. So too were his on-going problems in asserting his claims to legitimate authority in the Hijaz, in northern Syria and in Iraq in the wake of a decade of war in which he had overthrown the widely-recongnised caliphate of Ibn al-Zubayr. In the conflict with Rome, his claim to be *khalīfat Allāh* would be a rebuke—after Ephrem, Maximus and the Qur’an—to the notion of the emperor as literally Christ’s image, and so an assertion of the superior piety of the Arabians. In the conflict with the Zubayrids it provided a link, via its Qur’anic resonances, to Adam and David, two of the patriarchs of Jerusalem, where he was building the Dome of the Rock; in a rivalry with (primarily Abrahamic) Mecca, this was powerful rhetorical material. That is, the *khalīfat Allāh* coin certainly formed part of a wider programme of public enunciations of legitimate power, directed at diverse audiences within the caliphate and without.

A panegyric poem by al-Akḥṭal, most likely performed at ‘Abd al-Malik’s Syrian court in 691 during the closing stages of the conflict with Ibn al-Zubayr, points to both this “internal” context and to the wider, long-standing tropes of Near Eastern monarchy and Arabian poetry (at the same time, however, the Romans are present in the background of the riverine metaphor):

He who wades into the deep of battle, auspicious his augury, the Caliph of God
(*khalīfat Allāh*), through whom men pray for rain.

When his soul whispers its intention to him it sends him resolutely forth, his
courage and caution like two keen blades.

In him the common weal resides (*wa'l-mustamirr bihi amr al-jamī*), and after his assurance no peril can seduce him from his pledge.

Not even the Euphrates when its tributaries pour seething into it and sweep the giant willow-wort from its banks into the middle of its rushing stream,

And the summer winds churn it until its waves form agitated puddles on the prows of ships,

Racing in vast and mighty torrent from the mountains of the Romans whose foothills divert its course,

Is ever more generous than he to the suppliant or more dazzling to the beholder's eye.⁷⁵

The image of the ruler as sacred bringer of the rain is an Ancient Near Eastern motif, where the water stands for the material and spiritual blessings that are gained through loyalty to the king; the image of the ship on the Euphrates in flood also directly recalls a poem attributed to al-Nābigha al-Dhubaynī, a pre-Islamic poet addressing the King al-Nu'mān of al-Ḥīra in Iraq (r. ca. 580–602).⁷⁶ Hence, it may not be a coincidence that a ship sails on waters below the throne of the prince at Quṣayr 'Amra—constructed about forty-five years after al-Akḥṭal performed his panegyric for 'Abd al-Malik.

However, if 'Abd al-Malik's use of "God's caliph" can be connected to his projection of claims to monotheist imperial authority as he fought to establish his power in contest with both the Romans and Ibn al-Zubayr, al-Walīd II's use of similar iconography and ideas nearly fifty years later should be linked to his struggle, first, to retain his place in the succession during the reign of his uncle Hishām (r. 724–743) and, second, to retain the

caliphal succession for his own sons at the expense of other branches of ‘Abd al-Malik’s family in 743.⁷⁷ The audience for the palace iconography at Qusayr ‘Amra was probably quite limited, and in this respect, the allusions to Biblical and Qur’anic archetypes conform to the pattern that we see in the Roman context, where such assertions were for an elite, usually courtly, audience. Given that the palace is now known to have been constructed while he was defending his status as *walī al-‘ahd* (“heir apparent”—literally, “successor to, or possessor of, the covenant”), the primary purpose may have been to assert his royal credentials among his supporters.⁷⁸

In contrast, the letter was intended for a much wider audience: it was to be read out publicly at the congregational mosques of Iraq and Khurasan, and perhaps elsewhere, too.⁷⁹ The letter reads not only as an assertion of al-Walīd II’s claim to be “God’s caliph”, but also as a defense of caliphal prerogatives in the interpretation of the law: by the 740s, the idea that the wider community of Muslims had some claim to interpret the law had gained ground, and there is some evidence that al-Walīd II sought to reassert a more plenipotentiary role for the caliph.⁸⁰ As the letter has it: “God deputed His caliphs ... for the implementation of His decree (*ḥukm*), the establishment of his normative practice (*sunna*) and restrictive limits (*ḥudūd*), and for the observance of His ordinances (*farā’id*) and His rights (*ḥuqūq*) ...” One is reminded of the lament by the former Umayyad secretary, Ibn al-Muqaffa’, composed only about ten years later, that, with regards to a legal matter, “traced from the forefathers (*al-salaf*) upon which there is not agreement—one group manages it one way, others manage it another way.” Ibn al-Muqaffa’’s famous proposed solution was that the caliph should look into, “which of the two is most worthy of trust (*taṣdīq*) and which of the two most resembles justice (*‘adl*)”

in order to produce a single law code; this suggestion does not seem ever to have been taken up.⁸¹

That is, al-Walīd II's letter was also an intervention in the on-going and evolving contest over the relationship between the monarch and the law in early Muslim society—one that was already framed in terms of “book” and *sunna*, *ḥudūd*, *farā'id*, *ḥuqūq* and *'adl*. The connection with the discussion of the succession that followed was clear: al-Walīd II, as monarch, was making a claim to have the capacity of “loosing and binding” (in later classical thought, *al-ḥall wa'l-'aqd*), against the rival claims of those who also might assert that they represented God's covenant, and God's law—in the Roman Empire, this group were priests, but in the Muslim Empire, they could be understood as God's community of the Faithful.⁸²

<I> Conclusions

694 to 697 and 743 were unusual moments in the public articulation of Umayyad legitimacy. Media that would reach large numbers of ordinary Muslims—coins and a public decree, respectively—deployed the epithet “God's deputy”, where “commander of the faithful” was much more usual. However, in other contexts “God's deputy” was quite widely used—it is found in the poetry and prose and is referred to by the Umayyads' rivals. The analogy with the Roman imperial titles is striking: just as the emperor was *imperator*, *autokrator* or *basileus* in protocol and only *eikōn theou* or *hyparchos theou* in panegyric, so too the caliph. Both, of course, were “God's slaves”. That said, there is a strong impression that the Islamic context was more hostile to public expressions of royal sacral power. The clearest evidence for this comes from the coinage, where the first modifications to the Roman and Sasanian coins entailed adding the tag “In God's Name”

(and similar pious phrases) and where a flurried period of experimentation with “caliphal image” coinages in the 690s led quickly to a dramatic departure from centuries of Middle Eastern custom and the complete disappearance of any mention of the monarch from the precious coins.

It is probably wrong-headed to explain this simply in terms of “pious opposition” to the early experiments—after all, as Luke Treadwell has recently shown, the dramatic break in iconography helped the practical aim of facilitating the unification of the Roman and Sasanian fiscal systems.⁸³ Nonetheless, there certainly was also an ideological dimension to this change. Ultimately, it appears to stem from the idea of the *amr Allāh*—“God’s command”—which the caliphs’ claimed to represent on behalf of God’s community of the faithful.⁸⁴ This idea of the sovereignty of God appears to be echoed in the Qur’anic use of the term *khalīfa*. Whereas for many Christians, particularly in the Greek-speaking world, Adam was both the image and the deputy of God, in the Qur’an, as in the much of the late antique Judaic and Syriac tradition, he is merely God’s delegate and in no literal sense his “image.” In such a context, “God’s deputy” becomes a title at once humble and aggrandizing: true sovereignty is deferred to God, while the monarch rules on His behalf on earth.

It is also worth observing that there is no necessary connection between the title God’s caliph and a particular understanding of the sources of God’s law: *pace* Crone and Hinds, God’s deputy might still be beholden to God’s law, as the Roman discourse reminds us. However, “God’s caliph” does appear to have gained an ideological charge during the early to mid-eighth century (not lost, it seems, on al-Walīd II) that has left its mark in the Hadith literature.⁸⁵ This meant that when the Abbasids came to power, they tended to pair

the title with one that accentuated the founding position of God's Messenger—"successor to God's messenger" (*khalīfat rasūl Allāh*).⁸⁶ Again, the analogies with the Roman situation, and the question of "church" and "state" are striking. However, the old problem played out rather differently in the Islamic context: as Crone and Hinds observed, "the caliphate did fuse religion and politics from the start",⁸⁷ or to put it another way, the "state" *was* the "church" in very early Islam.

Hence, the caliph was in some sense both a "king" (i.e. a mere secular potentiary) and also "priest" (i.e. a sacerdotal or even soteriological figure). He was made such by the pledge of allegiance, or *bay'a*—a covenant at once earthly and salvific; the pledge made the ruler, but it also was understood, by some at least, to be the basis of salvation.⁸⁸ This recalls, of course, the covenants of ancient Israel, and the caliphs, like the Roman emperors, quickly came to think of themselves as new Davids and new Solomons and, in the case of al-Walīd II at least, as new Adams. However, whereas the Roman emperors, even if they sometimes disliked it, were raised to office by God's priests, there were no priests in Islam, just the community of the faithful, their past monarchs, and the memory of God's Prophet. These various sources of authority were the basis of competition over ideological power in early Islam; if al-Walīd II was trying to assert a more plenipotentary understanding of God's vicariate, he was probably already looking back to a bygone era (if it ever existed) from his own, very different, context, which is vividly described by his contemporary, Ibn al-Muqaffa'.

One question that remains is at what point the Muslims' leaders first began to use their various titles. With the protocollary titles we are on fairly secure ground. It is striking that in one of the very earliest attestations of these—an inscription at the bathhouse at

Hammat Gader, on the banks of Lake Tiberias—the inscription itself is in Greek, but Mu‘āwiya’s title is transliterated (as opposed to translated) as *abd alla Maavia amēra al-mōmenēn*. That is, in 662–663, these titles were conceived by masons working in Greek, or their patrons, as *Arabic* titles—even as part of the name of the Arabian monarch.⁸⁹ Thus, while it might be tempting to see them as translations from the Greek *doulos theou*, and some combination of *autokrator* and *pistōn*, they appear to have already been established in Arabic, and so any such “translation” would date to the earliest conquest period at the latest. Likewise, it is striking that in seventh- and early eighth-century Syriac texts, the word *amīr* is transliterated as the title for the Arabians’ commanders, indicating that the Arabic term for “commander” was also already in use in the conquest armies.⁹⁰ These protocollary titles very likely echo the practice of the Hijazi community in its earliest decades.

That *khalīfa*, in the sense of “deputy on earth” appears in the Qur’an, and is attested in pre-Islamic South Arabian inscriptions in the sense of “deputy” or “governor” (of the king), might perhaps suggest the same for the roots for this title, but, as we have seen, the evidence is much less secure.⁹¹ Landau-Tasseron and Donner look to the 690s for the origin of the title (and Hoyland cautiously suggests the same). ‘Abd al-Malik’s use of *khalīfat Allāh* on the coinage does stand out as unique, and very likely a response to very specific circumstances. It is best understood both as a product of the pressing need to reform the coinage for ideological and fiscal reasons as well as in the wider context of the literary evidence. However, the literary evidence, albeit thin, also tends to suggest a sort of pre-history for the title *before* it briefly appeared on the coins in the mid-690s.⁹² Indeed, the inscription on the coin would have been futile if it did not resonate with

existing ideas. Furthermore, it is also very important to note that, by analogy with the Roman situation, such a proclamation on a coin would, by definition be highly unusual, and so on its own it indicates very little about the prevalence of the concept and its articulation in other, less durable, media.

Although the title “God’s caliph” may sometimes have been deployed as a direct riposte to Roman imperial claims, it does not seem necessary to see it as having been directly borrowed or adapted from Roman usage. Rather, it appears that Islam took shape in a context where the same conceptual materials were to hand: the intertextuality of the Qur’an with various late antique religious materials has already been noted. That said, it does seem most likely, *pace* Crone and Hinds, that the adoption of the title “God’s caliph” as a monarchic and imperial formula was an initiative of the ruling Umayyad family and their allies: after all, the earliest attested poetic use of the title appears in a poem about ‘Uthmān attributed to Ḥassān ibn Thābit, apparently dated to the mid-650s; like al-Akhṭal, Ḥassān had been associated with the Christian, Arabic-speaking tribes of the Syrian Desert before he turned his talents to supporting the Muslim elite (al-Akhṭal, in contrast, remained a Christian); the possible allusion to the poetry of the Naṣrid panegyrist al-Nābigḥa al-Dhubayānī and of al-Akhṭal in the painting Quṣayr ‘Amra would also match this hypothesis.⁹³ In such a context the formula *khalīfa rasūl Allāh* might have developed in parallel, as part of a discourse within the conquering elite about the proper titles of the ruler. However, in the present state of the evidence, this hypothesis is impossible to prove categorically—after all the term *khalīfa* is in the Qur’an and the idea that ruler was in some sense the image or deputy of gods was a very ancient one in the Middle East.

Fig. 1 Drawing of the extant image of the enthroned ruler at Quṣayr ‘Amra and artist’s reconstruction (C. Vibert-Guigue and G. Bisheh, *Les Peintures de Qusayr ‘Amra: Un bain omeyyade dans la bâdiya jordanienne*, Amman, 2007, plate 15c)
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Fig. 2. Late antique Syrian mosaic of Adam enthroned. Hama (Syria), Hama Museum. Photograph by Dick Osseman. [COPYRIGHT GRANTED; 30 GBP FEE PAYABLE ON PUBLICATION]

Fig. 3. Floor mosaic depicting Adam and the animals, DATE. Ḥawīrtah (Syria), North Church. Drawing after Canivet and Canivet 1987, 2, plan x (Laroche).
[Geuthner@Geuthner.com]

Fig. 4 Detail of Adam enthroned, DATE. Ḥawīrtah (Syria), North Church. Drawing after ??? PLEASE COMPLETE

Fig. 5. ‘Standing Caliph’ dinar, 76 AH/696 AD. London, British Museum, CM 1954 10-11 2. [COPYRIGHT GRANTED]

Fig. 6 ‘Standing Caliph’ dirham 75 AH / 694–5 CE (after J. Walker, ‘Some new Arab-Sasanian coins’, *Numismatic Chronicle*, 6th series, 11 (1952), plate IX.4).

Fig. 7? ‘Miḥrāb and ‘anaza’ dirham c. 75–77 AH? / c. 694–7 CE? (after G.C. Miles, ‘Miḥrāb and ‘Anazah: A Study in Early Islamic Iconography’, G.C.Miles, ed., *Archaeologica Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld*, New York, 1952, plate XXVIII, no. 3).

Fig. 8? ‘Post-reform’ epigraphic dinar c.77 AH / 696–7 CE (British Museum, CM 1954 10-11 2) [COPYRIGHT GRANTED]

¹ I would like to thank my fellow participants in the 2011 Edinburgh conference, *The Umayyads: History, Art and Culture in the First Century of Islam*, as well as the convenors and participants at the 2012 *Late Antique and Byzantine Seminar* in Oxford, the 2012 Cambridge *Late Antique Network Seminar*, the 2012 *Middle Eastern Studies Seminar* at Manchester and the *Concepts and their Transmission in the Medieval Euromediterranean* conference at the German Historical Institute in Paris for their helpful comments and criticisms of earlier versions of this chapter. I would also like to thank James Montgomery and Luke Treadwell for helpful comments and discussions. All remaining errors are of course my own. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the AHRC during 2012 for my project *The First Muslim Empire: Re-Framing the Umayyads*, during which much of the work for this paper was carried out.

² Crone and Hinds 1986, 116-126. Quotation above at 120, with some modifications to the translation.

³ The letter is unique to al-Ṭabarī’s (d. 923) *History*, probably reached him from Aḥmad ibn Zuhayr (d. 892), who was in turn relying on early ninth-century traditionist al-

Madā'inī (d. c. 830–50): al-Ṭabarī 1879-1901, 2:1755–1756; Ibn al-Nadīm 1971, 115; Sezgin 1967, 311, 320; Rotter 1974, 103–133; Marsham 2009, 147. For scepticism concerning its transmission, see Calder 1987, 375–378.

⁴ Al-Qādī 1992, 215–276; 1993, 285–313; Marsham 2009, 145–155.

⁵ Abbās 1988, 191, 193, 209, 216, 271, 273, 298 (in two places); see also, for related phrases, 195, 217, 298, 301, 318. Among the former group of letters those that can be attributed to a particular caliph's reign belong to those of al-Walīd II and Marwān II (r. 744–7).

⁶ Crone and Hinds 1986, 6–11, 30–32. The earliest attestation of the title in poetry appears to be in a poem attributed to Ḥassān ibn Thābit (d. before 674), where the third (and first Umayyad) caliph is described as *khalīfat Allāh*: Ibn Thābit 1971, 1:96, no. 20, l.10; Crone and Hinds 1986, 6. Among the other early instances in the poetry are verses attributed to the Iraqi poet Miskīn al-Dārimī (d. ca. 708)—where the caliph Mu'āwīya is called *amīr al-mu'minīn*, but the Umayyad family in general, “the tribe (or sons) of God's Caliphs” (*banū khulafā' Allāh*): al-Iṣfahānī 1868, 18:71; *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., s.v. “Miskīn al-Dārimī” (by C. Pellat); Marsham 2009, 92–94.

⁷ A point observed by Crone and Hinds 1986, 12–13.

⁸ Crone and Hinds 1986, 12–21.

⁹ Crone and Hinds 1986, 1–3.

¹⁰ Crone and Hinds 1986, 42. Cf. Watt 1971, 565–572.

¹¹ Crone and Hinds 1986, 116–126. See now also Judd 2013.

¹² Crone and Hinds 1986, 111–115.

¹³ See, e.g., Berkey 2003, 78–80, 124–129; Hallaq 2005, 43–44; Rippin 2011, 67–69. In contrast, Al-Azmeh accepts that it was very early, but nonetheless would have the sense of “succession” (just) precede it: Al-Azmeh 1997, 74. Hakim suggests that the Hadith literature indicates the parallel existence of both titles by the early eighth century at the latest—*khalīfat Allāh* and *khalīfat rasūl Allāh*—where *khalīfat Allāh* was not at first controversial: Hakim 2005, 207–223. Likewise Dagron suggests that the two meanings probably coexisted from the outset: Dagron 2003, 50–53. However, he develops understanding of their implications in new ways through a very suggestive comparison with the Roman situation.

¹⁴ For arguments that partially accept and also modify Crone and Hinds’ views on this point, see Zaman 1997; Hallaq 2005, 43–78.

¹⁵ Crone 2004, 40.

¹⁶ Crone 2004, 195.

¹⁷ The Umayyad period is usually dated from *ca.* 661, but this could be pushed back to 644 (if ‘Uthmān’s caliphate is accepted as the beginning of the Umayyad period), and Crone’s current assessment leaves open the possibility of a still earlier date.

¹⁸ Cf. Crone and Hinds 1986, 2–3.

¹⁹ Landau-Tasseron 2000, 187. However, the “elective” basis of the caliphate is not in fact in tension with its sacral status. See below, ??.

²⁰ Landau-Tasseron 2000, 213.

²¹ Hakim 2005; a point echoed by Dagron on the basis of very different evidence: 2003, 50–53.

²² Hoyland 2006, 405, n.50.

²³ Donner 2010, 99, 209–211.

²⁴ Sarris 2011, 299–300.

²⁵ This aspect of the question does not concern Hakim, of course.

²⁶ Crone and Hinds 1986, 11.

²⁷ They are collected in Hoyland 1997, 690–691.

²⁸ Abbās 1988, 191–192, 194, 196, 197–198, 201, 205–208, 213, 215, 216, 217, 234–235, 237, 253, 267–268, 270, 272–276, 280, 297–299, 305–310, 316–319.

²⁹ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., s.v. “Commander of the Faithful” (by A. Marsham).

³⁰ Bates makes a similar point in 2003, 280–283.

³¹ For caliphs as “kings”, see Al-Azmeh 1997, *passim*; Marsham 2009, 1–2.

³² See the discussion in Dagron 2003, 36–53.

³³ On the pledge of allegiance as “God’s covenant”, see Marsham 2009, esp. 74–75, 109–110, 169–178.

³⁴ Crone 2004, 40.

³⁵ Grenfell and Hunt 1898, 1:224, no.140, dated to 550 AD.

³⁶ Chrysos 1978, 31.

³⁷ Eusebius 1902, 7:215; Drake 1976, 97. Cf. Dvornik 1966, 622. The translation here follows Drake.

³⁸ Cited in Anastos 1978, 37.

³⁹ Bell 2009, 31, citing Corippus 1976, 2:ll.427–428, (=p.60 (tr. 102)).

⁴⁰ Thomson, Howard-Johnston, and Greenwood 1999, 2:93, n. 576.

⁴¹ Dagron 2003, 48–50.

⁴² Cameron 1979, 21.

⁴³ Corippus 1976, 2:ll.11–46 (= pp. 48–9 [tr. 94–5]). Cf. Eusebius 1902, 6:208; Drake 1976, 92.

⁴⁴ Cormack 2000, 50–51.

⁴⁵ On Agapetus, see Bell 2009, 8–9.

⁴⁶ Bell 2009, 107 (§21), 120 (§68). Cf. Titus 1:1.

⁴⁷ Translated in Dagron 2003, 170.

⁴⁸ Various Qur’anic and Biblical patriarchs are invoked throughout Umayyad panegyric (not to mention in the names of some of the senior members of the family): Crone and Hinds 1986, 44, 54–57. See also the discussion in Crone 2004, 4–11, 40–41. However, this interpretation where the Qur’anic caliphs are archetypes of the current ruling caliphs is absent from the (later) exegesis, see al-Qāḍī 1988, 392–411. It is also implicitly criticised by various later scholars: Crone and Hinds 1986, 21–22, n. 86, 100, n. 17; Hakim 2005.

⁴⁹ Fowden 2004, 127–141.

⁵⁰ This is the date proposed by Fowden and certainly inscriptional evidence does strongly suggest that the palace belongs to the period of al-Walīd ibn Yazīd’s heir apparenacy (*wilāyat al-‘ahd*): Fowden 2004, 142–163; Imbert 2007, 45–46. See now also Luck 2012.

⁵¹ Fowden 2004; Vibert-Guigue and Bisheh 2007.

⁵² G. Fowden 2004, 115–141.

⁵³ See George in this volume on polysemy in Umayyad architecture.

⁵⁴ Philo 1854–1890, 3:75 (I): “For some persons say, and not without some reason and propriety, that this is the only way by which cities can be expected to advance in improvement, if either the kings cultivate philosophy, or if philosophers exercise the

kingly power. But Moses will be seen not only to have displayed all these powers—I mean the genius of the philosopher and of the king—in an extraordinary degree at the same time, but three other powers likewise, one of which is conversant about legislation, the second about the way of discharging the duties of high priest, and the last about the prophetic office; and it is on these subjects that I have now been constrained to choose to enlarge; for I conceive that all these things have fitly been united in him, inasmuch as in accordance with the providential will of God he was both a king and a lawgiver, and a high priest and a prophet, and because in each office he displayed the most eminent wisdom and virtue. We must now show how it is that every thing is fitly united in him.”

⁵⁵ Bezold 1888, 14. The translation is from Wallis 1927, 53.

⁵⁶ ‘The Bereshith or Genesis Rabba’, in Horne 1917, 4:46.

⁵⁷ Ephraem 1955, 2:17; 2010, 94. Further references to similar ideas are found in Ephraem 1998, 12, n. 69. See also Ruzer 2001, 261–262. This interpretation is in distinction from the rabbinical tradition, which does not make this connection between Adam being made in God’s image and his dominion: Gottstein 1994, 185.

⁵⁸ As noted by Melchert 2011, 120, where he observes, “It is apparently a commonplace among students of Christian apocrypha, although not (yet) students of the Qur’an, that the Qur’anic story presupposes this apocryphon”, citing Anderson 2001, 25, and others.

⁵⁹ See above, **note ??**.

⁶⁰ Al-Qāḍī 1988. Anthropomorphism was, of course, of on-going concern to Muslim theologians, but not in connection with this passage. This in spite of a Hadith that refers to Adam ‘being made in God’s image,’ which is discussed in Melchert 2011, where he

notes that the exegetes do not make anything of this in commenting on the Qur'an (119–20).

⁶¹ For the suggestion that al-Walīd II also did so in poetry, where he referred to Qur'anic terminology in defense of his caliphate, see Judd 2008, 439–458.

⁶² See above, ??.

⁶³ Conflicts internal to the Umayyad dynasty may also have had an ideological dimension, as in the case of the conflict between al-Walīd II and Yazīd III: Judd 2008, 454–456.

⁶⁴ For two recent proposals about the meaning of the 'pole-on-steps': Jamil 1999; Heidemann 2010, 23–34. Given the paucity of evidence and the multiple possible receptions of this image, it seems wise to conclude that the strongest implication was a clear denial of Roman imperial Christianity, in the context of a hardening of ideological boundaries and on-going military conflict, especially in the light of the anti-Trinitarian inscriptions that eventually replaced the 'pole': Treadwell 2009, 368, 373.

⁶⁵ Transliterated fairly literally, the slogans would read: *amīr almwmnīn khlft allh*. While abbreviation for reasons of space is possible (but very unusual), it is striking that in Epigraphic South Arabian (ESA), the *yā'* of *khalīfa* is not marked (and the *tā'* *marbūta* does not exist) as on the Abraha stele from the mid-sixth century which refers to one 'Yazīd son of Kabshat governor (*khlf*)': *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* 1881, no. 541, ll. 10-11. On the Syrian copper coins: Walker 1952, 110.

⁶⁶ 'God's Victory' is a Qur'anic phrase, e.g. Q 30:5, 48:3, 110:1. I owe this point to Alain George.

⁶⁷ For a recent summary and reinterpretation of the evidence for the reforms, see Treadwell 2009.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Grabar 1985, 273–275; Treadwell 2009, 361, 365; Sarris 2011, 299–300.

⁶⁹ Sarris 2011, 300.

⁷⁰ Grierson 1999, 7–8.

⁷¹ Johns 2003, 426–427.

⁷² Treadwell 2005, 11; 2009, 370–372.

⁷³ Indeed, Luke Treadwell recently suggested that the creation of a unified bimetallic currency system has been underestimated as a key causal factor in ‘Abd al-Malik’s reform. In this analysis, the “standing caliph” and then the “*miḥrāb* and ‘*anaza*” coins were a brief experiment, and the *khalīfat Allāh* inscription, was “to avoid the danger of misidentification” (of the new standing figure as either the Roman Emperor or the Sasanian King) and then retained almost by accident on the “*miḥrāb* and ‘*anaza*”: Treadwell 2005, 14; 2009, 361, 370. However, Treadwell also acknowledges ideological motivations as well more practical ones: Treadwell 2009, 361, 365, 369.

⁷⁴ While the extent of the change between the reigns of Mu‘āwiya and ‘Abd al-Malik is debated, there is no doubt that the programme of monumental architecture, coin reform, and other public articulations of authority by ‘Abd al-Malik and his son al-Walīd I (r. 705–15) was on an unprecedented scale: see, e.g. Johns, 2003; Treadwell 2009, 369.

⁷⁵ Stetkevych 1997, 103, 119–20; Marsham 2009, 102–106.

⁷⁶ Stetkevych 1997, 107; Marsham 2009, 33–34, 103.

⁷⁷ On these events, see Marsham 2009, 118–30, with references, and Judd 2008.

⁷⁸ On the date of the palace, see above, **??**. On the term *walī al-‘ahd*, see Marsham 2009, 113–119.

⁷⁹ Marsham 2009, 155–158.

⁸⁰ On the law, see Hallaq 2005, on al-Walīd II's stance, see Judd 2008.

⁸¹ Pellat 1976, §34–§38. Jokisch has recently argued that Hārūn al-Rashīd did codify the law, there is little concrete evidence for this: Jokisch 2007.

⁸² For the Roman context, see Dagron 2003, *passim* and esp. 3, 295.

⁸³ See above, n. ??

⁸⁴ A point noted by Hallaq 2005, 31. For one apparently early instance of the phrase, see Marsham 2012, 72. The term is Qur'ānic: see, e.g. Q 4:47, 9:48, 9:106.

⁸⁵ See above, n. ??

⁸⁶ Crone and Hinds 1986, 80–96.

⁸⁷ Crone and Hinds 1986, 115.

⁸⁸ Crone 2004, 21–23; Marsham 2009, 97–100.

⁸⁹ Conversely, the title *was* translated into Pahlavi on some seventh-century coins: Hoyland 1997, 690.

⁹⁰ As in the case of the “Maronite Chronicle”, which dates to before 727, and probably before 680: Brooks 1955, 71; Palmer and Brock 1993, 32. For the term in a South Arabian inscription, see *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* 1881, 4:363, ll. 3–4. For early Arabic attestations, see Marsham 2012, 83, with references.

⁹¹ For the Qur'ān see above ?? and nn. ??; for the South Arabian inscriptions, see, above, n. ??.

⁹² See above, ??.

⁹³ See above, ??.